

Why do people avoid wine?

Comparisons across Australia, Canada, United Kingdom, United States and India

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A study of drinkers in Australia, Canada, UK, US and India who rarely or never consumed wine revealed that wine avoidance as a phenomenon may be less culturally sensitive than first thought, and that gaining recommendations from others was a key factor in choosing wine.

Wine aficionados can be found in many countries and much research is undertaken in an attempt to understand what attracts consumers to wine. Recently, we published an article (Saliba, Ovington and Gunaratne 2013) focussing not on those who drank wine, but on those who 'avoided' wine (though did consume other alcoholic beverages). That work reported on results from Australia. There is emerging attention paid to cultural differences in wine consumption, showing large differences in some areas (e.g. health perception, see Yoo, Saliba, MacDonald, Prenzler and Ryan 2013) and negligible differences in others.

We extended the results obtained for wine avoiders in Australia to study other countries. Some countries were theoretically similar to Australia in terms of wine consumption, namely the United Kingdom, whereas, Canada and the United States have specific regulatory and societal factors that may lead to different results. Differences are highly likely to be found for India, where wine consumption is only just emerging. The results of this study will be useful to exporters and potential exporters who are considering marketing to emerging markets or consumers for whom wine is not usually their alcohol beverage of choice.

STUDY METHOD

Adults who consumed alcohol regularly, within healthy limits, but rarely or never consumed wine, and were legal drinking age were recruited for this study. Eighty-three people from Australia, Canada, UK, US and India participated in the study across 15 focus groups; three focus groups within each country. The focus groups from each country were segmented into age generations: Millennials (18–30 years), Generation X (31–46 years) and Baby Boomers (47+ years) in order to make comparisons across each of the age groups. The legal drinking age differs across countries; the minimum age in the Millennials focus groups was 21 for the US and India, 19 for Canada, and 18 for Australian and the UK. Ages of participants ranged from 21 to 64 years, with a mean age of 41 years. The segmentation of focus groups is shown in Table 1 (see page 64). An Australian marketing research company recruited all participants and moderated the focus groups online. Each focus group joined an online discussion at an arranged time. The questions were posted in a chat window for all participants to respond to in writing. Group members were able to read and respond to other's comments in the group.

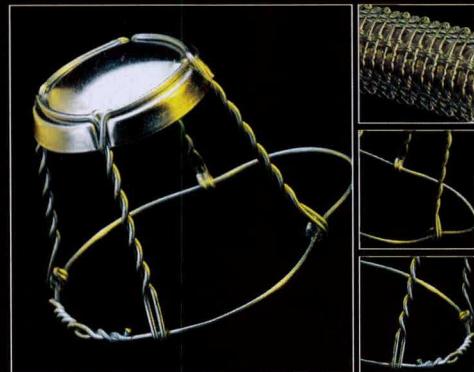
Thematic analysis was used to identify the key themes (see Table 2, see page 64) from the focus group interviews. These themes developed from the participants' comments, and were not the opinions of those of the interviewer or authors. The focus group transcripts were

imported into qualitative analysis software NVivo 10 that was used to code key semantic themes. The themes were categorised to reflect the similarity of content, and were repeatedly checked for similarities and differences and categorised until it was agreed that the thematic categories best reflected the content.

RESULTS

We did not find much variation in the demographic characteristics between countries, except for India. All Indian participants were male

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Table 1. The segmenting of the focus groups for the comparison study.

	Australia	Canada	United Kingdom	United States	India
	Number of participants (Males, Females)				
Age group					
18-34 years (Millennials)†	6 (4, 2)	6 (3, 3)	5 (3, 2)	4 (1, 3)	8 (8, 0)
35-46 years (Generation X)	6 (1, 5)	7 (4, 3)	4 (3, 1)	5 (3, 2)	5 (5, 0)
47+ (Baby Boomers)	7 (5, 2)	3 (1, 2)	6 (5, 1)	5 (2, 3)	6 (6, 0)

Table 2. Summary of categories and themes from perceptions and barriers to wine consumption.

Main category	Primary themes	Secondary themes
Complications	Consuming	Context Effects
	Purchasing	Confusion Price
Culture and social influence	Identity	Gender stereotypes Class/Cultural stereotypes Contextual stereotypes Advertising
	Purpose	Pleasure Social
	Food	Consumed with food Cooking with wine
	Recommendations	Significant others Liquor store staff
	Health benefits	
Wine characteristics	Sensory experience	Taste
	Alcohol content	Smell
	Other characteristics	Not refreshing Speed of drinking
	Fake wine*	

*Fake wine was a theme that only occurred in the Indian focus groups.

and were more highly educated compared with the other countries. As participation criteria was that people had to consume alcohol other than wine, this requirement may have made it difficult to recruit females in India. The thematic analysis found that overall the reasons for avoiding wine were fairly similar, especially between the four Western countries. However, there were notable differences between the Western countries and India, as expected, which is still an emerging wine drinking country. For most people the reasons for avoiding wine were complex. Three main categories of wine avoidance themes were identified; each of these having a number of primary and secondary themes (see Table 2).

CATEGORY 1: COMPLICATIONS

The category of complications arose from perceived difficulties related to

consuming and purchasing wine, compared with other types of alcohol.

Consuming

Within the primary theme of the complication with consuming wine, two secondary themes emerged, context and effects. The context where alcohol is consumed was either a barrier or an incentive to drink wine. A common response was that wine is not an easy drink to consume at a pub or bar, but more of a drink they would consume at home or at a restaurant. Most participants would drink wine at special events or a formal dinner, as other types of alcohol were not appropriate. The theme 'effects' encompasses the various complaints about how wine causes headaches, illness and more severe hangovers than other types of alcohol.

Purchasing

Complications involved in purchasing

wine included confusion over what type of wine to purchase, and the price of wine. Most participants lamented that there are too many wine varieties and brands, making it difficult to choose. However, there was the acknowledgement that a lack of knowledge was the main reason why choice became a problem. The safe option, they suggested, would be to buy a 'good quality wine' but that these wines are too expensive. Price was a complication that was a problem across all countries. For example, the UK Generation X reported the high cost of buying wine by the glass when out at a restaurant or bar. They found purchasing wine by the bottle more cost effective. All three of the US focus groups complained the most about the high cost of wine. Indian participants also stated that the cost of wine was too high, although compared with spirits it was a cheaper option.

CATEGORY 2: CULTURE AND SOCIAL INFLUENCE

The largest category emerging from the focus groups was around the cultural stereotypes and schemas people held about wine, including beliefs about who the wine consumer is, the purpose of wine, and that wine is a beverage mainly consumed with food. This category also reports the social influences that lead them to consume it occasionally such as asking for recommendations, and the health benefits of wine.

Identity

The theme 'identity' reflects the stereotypes participants hold about the 'wine consumer'. Several believed (mostly men) that wine is a feminine drink and that beer is more for men. In addition, wine is believed to be a European drink and less popular in their respective countries. Across all countries, wine is believed to be for the 'classy person' or the wine connoisseur. Those from the Western countries did not identify with being this sort of person. While the Indian groups held the same opinions, they saw this as a positive rather than a negative stereotype. However, in certain contexts all groups considered wine a drink for everyone. These included business events, Christmas and other special occasions; although, it was not considered an everyday drink. Finally, several participants could not recall having come across wine advertising. As most wine companies cannot afford to advertise on television or in magazines, this is not surprising.

Purpose

When asked 'what the purpose of wine was for', the most common response across all countries was for pleasure and for promoting socialisation. In addition, the purpose of wine was to promote socialising at special events.

Food

A strong theme came from all countries and generations in regard to the association between wine and food. Many people stated the only time they would drink wine was at a dinner, and that wine enhances a food experience. Some suggested that they would like to learn more about how to pair a wine with a special meal. While the wine industry is currently making these suggestions, we believe that this practice could further benefit the wine industry by encouraging low wine consumers to purchase a wine to match their food, a practice which is commonplace in highly 'evolved' wine countries like France and Italy.

Recommendations

As these people generally lack knowledge about wine, there was a frequent comment that they relied on recommendations from significant others and from liquor store staff. Significant others usually meant a friend or colleague who regularly purchased wine. While many reported happily asking the liquor store staff for a suggestion on which wine would be good to try, others hinted at distrust about the knowledge staff had. We would recommend collaborative training between the industry and liquor store staff to improve staff knowledge of wine in order to assist those with a lack of knowledge to make a confident choice and, therefore, repeat sales.

Health benefits

The health benefits of wine were widely discussed by all participants in the study. The most frequent comments related to benefits of red wine on cardiovascular health and stress reduction. Although, a few participants were concerned about health benefits being offset by over consumption of alcohol, and that maybe the reported health benefits were mainly coming from the wine industry. Overall, most accepted that wine was a healthier

alcohol choice and would like to learn more about these benefits. Some people stated that they would drink wine more often if it were proven to be good for their health.

CATEGORY 3: WINE CHARACTERISTICS

The category of 'wine characteristics' come from the experiences participants reported as barriers to wine consumption. These included their sensory experiences, the high alcohol content of wine, other characteristics such as the lack of refreshment and speed at which wine can be drunk. Specific to India only, there were reported issues of the sale of 'fake wines' that were not always easy to detect until after the beverage has been consumed.

Sensory experiences

Taste was by far the most commonly reported barrier to purchasing and consuming wine, from all the focus groups. The taste of wine was described as too bitter or too sour and even too strong. However, India differed as the taste of 'authentic wine' was liked across generations, and only 'fake' wines were disliked. A few from the Australian focus groups also stated disliking the smell, or liking the smell but not liking the taste.

Alcohol content

When asked about their reasons for not liking wine, several participants felt that the alcohol content was too high. This belief often came from previous experience where wine made them intoxicated too quickly compared with other alcoholic drinks. Unlike their Western counterparts, Indians lamented that wine was 'too weak' (in alcohol) and that they preferred stronger alcohol such as spirits.

Other characteristics

Many people disliked that they could not drink wine quickly and that it was not refreshing, so preferred to drink beer as it can easily be drunk faster and provides a more

refreshing, and thirst quenching experience. Wine on the other hand, needs to be sipped and lacks the refreshment that beer provides.

Fake wine

An unsurprising theme from the Indian groups was the existence of fake wine. There is also the issue of being able to detect the difference between a fake and an authentic wine. India participants frequently reported that authentic wine was difficult to buy. Authentic wines appear to be more available in the larger metropolitan areas. All of the Indian participants had encountered fake wines, but only some were able to identify these.

CONCLUSION

The similarities outweighed the differences in countries other than India. This was surprising given the regulatory and societal differences between Australia and the US and Canada, but perhaps not as surprising for the UK. These results provide confidence that understanding wine avoidance as a phenomenon may be less culturally sensitive than first thought. The next phase of our study involves a quantitative survey of all relevant countries; it will be interesting whether that work uncovers any differences between the developed wine drinking countries, and how it is able to characterise the differences between those and the emerging wine market of India.

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